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SUBJECT: PORTUGUESE PM SOCRATES REPLACES TWO MINISTERS IN
MINI RESHUFFLE

Classified By: Dana M. Brown, Pol-Econ Officer, Embassy Lisbon
Reason 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (SBU) Summary: Amid growing criticism by the public over service cutbacks and other austerity measures, Prime Minister Socrates accepted the resignations of the Ministers of Health and Culture on January 29. Both outgoing ministers were publicly criticized for mishandling aspects of their portfolios, but the reshuffle left other controversial ministers untouched. Socrates's moves were both a response to public criticism and an attempt to assuage growing unhappiness among leftist elements of his own party with what they view as many of his right-of-center policies. The Prime Minister's decision to stand behind several other controversial ministers was a demonstration both of his strong loyalty to those on his team and a desire to avoid sending any signal that his government is engaged in anything other than business as usual. End summary.

Hit the Road, Jack

12. (U) On January 29, Prime Minister Socrates ended weeks of speculation about a likely Cabinet reshuffle when he announced the resignations of Minister of Health Antonio Correia de Campos and Minister of Culture Isabel Pires de Lima. Correia de Campos had been under public fire for some time, but the criticism had escalated in recent weeks because of outrage surrounding the closure of a number of emergency rooms and the impact on delivery of critical health services. Correia de Campos had essentially been a dead man walking since President Cavaco Silva's New Year's address, in which he criticized the minister for failing to communicate to Portuguese why and how he was implementing a number of major health reforms, and failing to reassure poor citizens that they would continue to have access to medical services.

13. (U) Minister of Culture Isabel Pires de Lima stepped down after several public tiffs during the past year, including a dispute with the mayor of Portugal's second largest city which ultimately required the Prime Minister's intervention, and two months after circulation of a petition calling for her resignation which attracted 2800 signatures. Pires de Lima had earlier earned Cavaco Silva's ire when she dismissed a friend of his, the director of one of Portugal's most prominent museums, after the latter criticized the minister's policies in August 2007. The Portuguese president was on vacation but publicly decried the dismissal, describing the museum director as a civil servant who personified the highest ideals of professionalism and public service.

Smelling blood

¶4. (U) Sensing an opportunity, Luis Menezes, leader of the principal opposition party (the PSD), said the departure of Correia de Campos was evidence of the government's recognition that its health policies had failed and had fallen into a "directionless mire." He then challenged Socrates to a debate about the Prime Minister's three-year record in office. Popular Party (CDS-PP) leader Paulo Portas, whose charisma and visibility give his words more resonance than his party's meager representation in parliament (12 seats) would suggest, called for more heads to roll: "The change shows weakness in the government and isn't enough. Why let the Ministers of Public Works, Education, Economy, and Agriculture remain?" he asked. The leaders of the Communist Party and of the Left Bloc, unsurprisingly, called for a change in the government's policies, underscoring the "fundamental right of citizens to health care."

Comment

¶5. (C) Socrates remains Portugal's most popular political party leader, according to public opinion polls, and he would almost certainly win re-election if a vote were held today. He is also a stubborn politician who strongly resists doing anything that can be perceived as succumbing to public pressure. In this case, however, he felt obligated to act, both because of public concern about the performance of a number of his ministers and growing restlessness among the PS leftist wing about what they see as the rightward tilt of many of the Prime Minister's policies. Correia de Campos and Pires de Lima were fairly obvious sacrificial lambs, given widespread media coverage of Portuguese negatively affected by the closure of certain emergency rooms as well their having been singled out by President Cavaco Silva. Socrates is clearly hoping that the reshuffling of only two ministers

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will address the desire of many Portuguese for some change while conveying the image of a government that remains very much in control. One PS insider told us that Socrates had acted primarily to address the concerns of Manuel Alegre, a party elder statesman who has threatened to form his own party unless Socrates started acting more like a Socialist. It will be interesting to see whether the appointment of Ana Jorge as minister of health will do the trick -- she is very close to Alegre but has vowed to continue her predecessor's policies.

¶6. (U) The new ministers -- Ana Maria Teodoro Jorge for the health portfolio and Jose Antonio Pinto Ribeiro for the culture portfolio -- were sworn in on January 30. Some biographic details follow below.

Ana Jorge

¶7. (U) Ana Jorge has been a practicing pediatrician for more than twenty years and had been Director of Pediatric Services at the Garcia de Orta Hospital since 2001. Under the Guterres Administration (1995-2002), Jorge served as the President of the Regional Health Administration for Lisbon. During her tenure as President, Jorge was charged, along with 25 other public officials, with misappropriation of public funds to Amadora-Sintra Hospital and fined over 3.5 million euros. Jorge was subsequently cleared of wrongdoing during arbitration. Jorge does not belong to a political party but is very close to PS member of the National Assembly -- and party elder statesman -- Manuel Alegre. She is 58 years old and was born in Lourinha, Portugal.

Jose Antonio Pinto Ribeiro

¶8. (U) Pinto Ribeiro is a well-established lawyer and human rights activist, especially on anti-trafficking issues. He studied law at the Classic University of Lisbon from 1964-1969 and went on to teach law at the Superior Institute

of Economics, the Autonomous University Law School, the Superior Institute of Business and Work Sciences, and the New Lisbon University Law School. He participated in an individual International Visitors Program (IVP) in 1994 and has a close relationship with the Embassy's Public Affairs Section. In 2006, Pinto Ribeiro was named Administrator of the Modern and Contemporary Art Collection by Portuguese art collector and entrepreneur Joe Bernardo. Pinto Ribeiro is married to TV presenter Anabela Mota Ribeiro and is 61 years old.

Stephenson